with the completion of the North American Free Trade Agreement at the end of the Bush administration and President Clinton's signature on the 1993 enabling legislation. Hemispheric free trade offered a chance to expand the economic pie dramatically during the decade. With U.S. unemployment falling toward 4% and Nafta a notable success, there was reason to believe that the U.S. would lead the region toward trade liberalization. International trade was at the core of the U.S. economic breakout of the 1980s, and Latin America hoped to become a partner.

But beyond rhetoric and a summit full of promises, the U.S. basically lost its interest in Latin America. The Clinton administration offered no follow-though on the free trade vision, no substitute vision, and barely an apology. The free-trade vision morphed into fair trade, code language for maintaining the status quo. U.S. demands for special labor and environmental standards as conditions for an agreement effectively ruled out U.S.-led trade liberalization. Latin America's disappointment at U.S. indifference deepened, as U.S. promises of trade and engagement proved hollow.

As the decade progressed, the U.S. role in the region turned destructive. Washington's policy gurus promoted weak currencies, high tax rates and big government, ignoring the resulting poverty and political stress. A cycle of damage, financial crises and flat-footed U.S. responses ensued. The U.S. dragged its feet on IMF/World Bank reform and proposed no pro-growth model for international development. Colombia's civil war worsened, fed by bad economic policies, high inflation and U.S. disinterest.

Through its own efforts, Latin America has had some important successes in the last decade, including Mexico's 2000 election and Brazil's quick return to a stable currency after its 1999 devaluation. But the 1990s should have been much better for the region given the strength of the U.S. economy and the high hopes of 1992 and 1993.

Latin America's growth is now well short of its potential, leaving millions unemployed and impoverished. Worse yet, because many of these countries defended their anti-market policies in IMF-speak and Washington's ''no-pain, no-gain'' view that capitalism should hurt, disillusioned populations are now blaming free-markets for their declining circumstances.

Rather than free trade, the administration championed IMF-style austerity for Latins. No tax rate was too high, as witnessed by President Clinton's outspoken support of Argentina's failing experiment with tax hikes and a broad-based 21% value-added tax. In places like Brazil, Ecuador and Colombia, the U.S. and IMF have encouraged financial transaction taxes, one of the most harmful types of taxes for the development of sound financial markets. While Europe is turning to tax cuts to bolster its competitiveness, the Washington elite has pushed Latin America forcefully into higher tax rates and militant revenue extraction.

The U.S. policy failure toward Latin

The vacuum in U.S. international policy is equally apparent in energy issues. By 2000, Mr. Chavez became OPEC's cheerleader for expensive oil, joining Saddam Hussein in Bagdad to discuss strategy. It is inexplicable that Mexico, a Nafta partner, participated actively in OPEC quotas in 1999. The U.S. and Mexico should work closely together to develop new North American energy resources, an undertaking that would be hugely profitable for Mexico and would lessen U.S. dependence on OPEC.

The 1990s began auspiciously for Latin American currencies with the establishment of Argentina's currency board. Inflation fell, and both the economy and financial markets surged. The brain drain that had plagued Argentina for years reversed as business school graduates headed back home to build companies.

Soon, however, the U.S. administration's opposition to regional currency stability asserted itself, leaving Argentina the odd country out. The Clinton administration and the IMF, working closely together, declined to work for currency stability in Russia, Venezeula, Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, or Southeast Asia. This culminated in their outright rejection of a currency board in Indonesia in early 1998 and the Russian default later that year. The U.S. intoned that ''a strong dollar is in our national interest,'' but did nothing to share this approach abroad. Ecuador has recently dollarized, embracing a foreign currency in the hope that its grinding fall into poverty will stop. But in Ecuador's words, the IMF's only role in this progress was to do no further harm.

The result of the weak-currency policies of the 1990s was predictable. The poor could not protect themselves from the ensuing inflation and the middle class fell backward, undoing years of hard work. Latin American poverty grew sharply. The World Bank found ''no clear evidence of progress in reducing poverty'' in the 1990s, counting 183 million people living on less than $2 per day in 1998, up from 162 million in 1993. A United Nations study found that 51% of rural Latin households lived in poverty in 1997. In Colombia, where civil war threatened, the currency sank and rural poverty rose to 54% in 1997 from 45% in 1980.

The coming U.S. election offers Latin America the chance for an end to the eight-year vacuum in U.S. policy. The Clinton-Gore administration has wasted a decade of U.S. prosperity, making no real effort to share the U.S. techniques of prosperity with our neighbors. The policy vacuum has hurt both the U.S. and Latin America and deserves to be corrected. A U.S. policy built on free trade, stable currencies, lower tax rates, smaller government, more economic freedom and a genuine interest in Latin America's success would begin to undo the damage.

HONORING RICK SHEETS

HON. SCOTT McINNIS

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 12, 2000

Mr. McINNIS. Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I take this moment to celebrate the life of Rick Sheets. Rick, a popular radio personality, recently passed away at age 45. For many years Rick has entertained the people of western Colorado, whether it be joking around during his radio spots or rooting for the Denver Broncos. As family, friends, and colleagues mourn this incredible loss, I would like to pay tribute to this remarkable human being.

Rick was known to his listeners as Rick Lawrence. For over two decades he entertained listeners of the Grand Valley. He has worked in a number of different capacities for many different radio stations throughout western Colorado. He began with KEXO–AM then on to KSTR–AM and FM and most recently with Mustang Country 95.1 and KOOL 107.9. Throughout his tenure in radio, he was best known for his dedication to Broncos' football where he earned the nickname Doc Bronco.

Rick's reputation on the air was exceptional but it was his work in the community that will be long remembered. He served as a Partners volunteer and used his on-air experience to work as a television auctioneer for over ten years. He was a well-known supporter of the March of Dimes, giving a number of on-air interviews and also worked with the Bronco Youth Foundation.

Rick entertained and served the community of Grand Junction in immeasurable ways. His work with Colorado's youth will not soon be forgotten. Rick served his community well and his loving memory will live on in the hearts of all that had the pleasure of knowing him, both on the air and off. He will be greatly missed.